

J.D. BERNAL PEACE LIBRARY

REPORT OF A CONFERENCE ON


**CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL
WARFARE**

February 22 & 23, 1968

HX
632
A1
W9
No. 1527

, Claverton St. London S.W. 1
828 - 8492

MAIN



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2018 with funding from
University of Alberta Libraries

J. D. BERNAL PEACE LIBRARY

Report of a Conference on Chemical and Biological Warfare

The first major conference sponsored by the J.D. Bernal Peace Library was held in the Bonnington Hotel, London, on February 22nd and 23rd, 1968. It brought together specialists from several countries to clarify the present position of CBW, to investigate the consequences of this type of warfare and to discuss proposals for its control. Behind this conference was the growing realisation among scientists that CBW research is on the brink of the same kind of fundamental discoveries which in physics made possible the production of nuclear weapons. Biologists and chemists are in turn concerned about their responsibilities in the development of weapons of mass genocide and are determined to try to forestall that possibility.

THE CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

The conference was organised by a committee of which Professor E.H.S. Burhop, F.R.S., was the Chairman and Dr. Steven Rose the Secretary. Some sixty invited participants from Czechoslovakia, France, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States heard and discussed 18 papers under the chairmanship of Professor C.F. Powell, F.R.S. After an opening address by Lord Ritchie Calder the conference considered the present state of chemical weapons, napalm, biological weapons and defoliants and then discussed the position of CBW in international law. The second day the research policies of the major powers were described and evidence of the recent use of chemical agents in Vietnam and the Yemen examined. The conference

concluded with a discussion of the social and political issues raised by research on and use of CBW, followed by proposals for its control.

The conference was extensively reported in the newspapers and it is worth noting the points brought out in the addresses and discussions which seem to have made the greatest impact on the general public. It was made clear that CBW techniques are at present too uncertain or liable to backfire for them to be used as major weapons of military strategy. However, the present distinction between the use of lethal and non-lethal gas is not valid in the circumstances under which these chemicals are actually used in Vietnam, where riot control gases have produced numerous fatalities in confined spaces. Both riot control gas and chemical defoliants can have lethal effects under any conditions on vulnerable civilians - the very old, the young, or the infirm. Fears were also expressed that acceptance of the use of 'non-lethal' gas and defoliants in warfare would weaken restraints on the development of more powerful CBW weapons.

The conference heard papers on the CBW research policies of the USA and USSR but was naturally more closely concerned with the position in this country. Although the British Microbiological and Chemical Research Establishments may be justified in claiming that their own work is purely defensive, defensive research must often have offensive implications, particularly when it is carried out secretly. The distinction is in any case meaningless if the U.K. can have access to U.S. offensive research results under research pooling arrangements. It was further brought out that the

riot control gas, 'CS', used in Vietnam by the U.S., was developed at the Chemical Defence Experimental Establishment, Porton, in the 1950's and is manufactured in the States under license from this country.

PROPOSALS FOR CONTROL

Because CBW is still so relatively undeveloped in comparison with other weapon technologies the participants hoped that its terrible potentialities might still be prevented. Their proposals were as follows :-

1. The scientific community should take a stand against secret research on CBW in universities and research stations. The work at Porton should be declassified, starting with that of the Microbiological Research Establishment.

2. The Geneva Convention on the use of chemical warfare except in retaliation should be strengthened to include 'non-lethal' gases and defoliants. Violations could be investigated by an international team, possibly under the supervision of WHO.

3. The eventual aim should be the complete renunciation of CBW altogether by all countries. There is still a possibility that this might be accomplished and serve as a starting point for more complete disarmament as there is still no overwhelming investment of money and personnel in this field.

PUBLICITY FOR THE CONFERENCE

Nearly all the London papers were represented at the conference by their scientific or military correspondents and reports appeared in the Daily Mail, the Daily Mirror, the Evening News, the Financial Times, the Guardian, the Morning Star, the Telegraph, and the Times. There were comprehensive articles on the front page of the Sunday Observer, February 25th, in the New Scientist, February 29th, and a briefer mention in the New Statesman, March 1st.

The BBC recorded and filmed the conference, using excerpts in a half-hour radio broadcast in the series 'New World' on February 23rd. A further broadcast in the Third Programme, "Make a desolation and call it peace ..." was given on March 25th and April 11th. Selections from this programme will be printed in the Listener. A television programme based on the conference is now being prepared by the BBC.

This informed and responsible press and broadcasting coverage is a measure of the conference's success in presenting its technical and scientific subject in terms which spoke to the specialist and layman alike and evoked not only strong concern but constructive thought and action.

CONFERENCE PAPERS

The following papers were presented at the conference. They will form the basis of a book to be published by Harraps in the autumn. Provisionally entitled CBW: Chemical and Biological Warfare, it will be edited by Dr. Steven Rose and will also take into account the discussions which formed an important part of the

conference. Stencilled copies of most of the individual papers and a bibliography on CBW are available from the library at 1/ each.

Lord Ritchie Calder - 'Introductory Address on CBW'.

J. Perry Robinson, London - 'Available chemical weapons'.

Dr. V. Sidel, Boston - 'A brief note on napalm'.

Dr. C.R.B. Joyce, London - 'The use of psychedelic agents in chemical warfare'.

Professor I. Malek, Czechoslovak Academy of Science, Prague - 'Biological weapons and defence'.

Professor A. Galston, Yale - 'Defoliants: the agents'.

Professor J. Mayer, Harvard - 'The effects of defoliants'.

Dr. I Brownlie, Wadham College, Oxford - 'The legal issues in CBW'.

Miss E. Langer, New York - 'The United States research programme'.

R. Clark and J. Perry Robinson, London - 'Research and policy on CBW in the United Kingdom'.

Dr. D. Viney, London - 'CBW potential and policy - the Soviet Union'.

Dr. F. Kahn, Faculty of Medicine, University of Paris - 'Chemical weapons in use in Vietnam'.

Professor M. Meselson, Harvard and Dr. D. Viney, London - 'The use of chemical weapons in the Yeman'.

Professor C.F. Powell, F.R.S., Bristol University - 'Scientific Ethics'.

Dr. V. Sidel, Boston - 'Biological warfare and medical ethics'.

Dr. S. Rose, London - 'CBW defence research and the universities'.

Dr. J. Humphrey, F.R.S., Mill Hill - 'Practical proposals : Introduction'.

Professor M. Meselson, Havard - 'Preventing the use of CBW'.

Dr. R. Bjornerstedt, SIPRI, Stockholm - 'The work of the Swedish Peace Research Institute'.

CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

Miss P. Abraham, Prof. D.G. Arnott, London, Dr. A. Bailey, Mr. S. Bailey, Mr. G. Carritt, Sir Frederick Bawden, F.R.S., Prof. J.D. Bernal, London, Prof. P. Biquard, W.F.S.W., Rear Admiral Sir Anthony Buzzard, Mr. J. Cookson, Newcastle, the Rev. Fr. Corbishley, Mrs. P. Crane, U.N.A., Mr. J.G. Crowther, Mr. Tam Dayell, M.P., Mrs. Peggy Duff, I.C.D.P., Dr. B. Goodwin, Dr. J.P. Guignatrd, Dr. P. Harvey, London, Dr. J.W. Jeffery, London, Mr. K.R. Johnstone, Dr. M. Lietenberg, SIPRI, Dr. Patricia Lindhop, Barts, London, Dr. N. MacDonald, M.A.P.W., Mr. J. Maddox, Mr. A. Malone, Miss V. Mauthner, Dr. S. Maxwell, Dr. Joan McMichael, Medical Aid, Commander Hugh Mulleneux, Mr. T. Namec, Dr. J.S. Oxford, Mr. D. Paterson, B.O.C., Mr. D. Pavett, Dr. A. Pirie, F.R.S., Mr. N.W. Pirie, F.R.S., Professor M. Pollock, Edinburgh, Dr. R. Press, Cabinet Office, Mr. R. Reid, Horizon, Mr. A.V.S. de Reuck, C.R.S., Mr. D. Robinson, L.S.E., Mr. J. Rosenhead, V.S.C., Mr. S. Sedley, London, Dr. A. Steinbach, London, Mr. P.M. Sommer, Harraps, Mr. R. Stetler, B.R.P.F., Dr. T. Swain, Cabinet Office, Mr. C. Sweet, B.P.C., Mrs. A. Synge, Mr. J. Takman, Stockholm, Dr. Viney, London, Prof. C. Waddington, Edinburgh, Prof. P. Wall, London, Prof. M. Wilkins, Mr. J. Wolfers, I.L.M., Dr. W.A. Wooster, Dr. Amica Young, British Committee for Peace in Vietnam.